



Representative

Patricia **LANTZ**



26th District

The Toll issue in the Legislature

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Wherever you stand on the question of imposing bridge tolls to address traffic problems at the Tacoma Narrows Bridge, I believe you will agree that any public vote on the issue should be fair.

As your representative, I'm proposing legislation to make this fall's Tacoma Narrows Advisory Vote fairer to the families and businesses who depend on the Narrows Bridge. This newsletter describes what I am proposing and why.

This is an extremely urgent issue. The people in our Legislative District suffer more than anyone else from the terrible congestion on SR 16. We would also suffer more than anyone else from excessive bridge-tolls, or from bridge-tolls that fail to deliver promised relief from congestion.

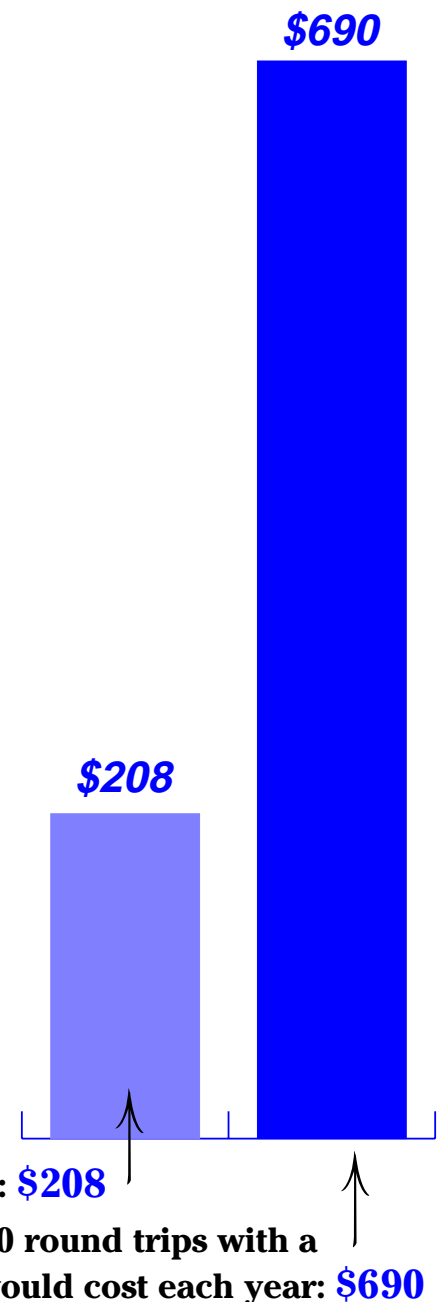
To regular bridge users, the annual cost of even a \$3 round-trip toll could easily be three or four times what the typical Washington family pays in total gas taxes annually!

With so much at stake, the public deserves guarantees the Advisory Vote will be fair, and guarantees their rights and financial security will be protected after the vote, if the project is approved.

Please take a look inside.

Sincerely,

Patricia Lantz
Rep. Patricia Lantz



What a typical Washington family pays in gas taxes each year: \$208

(Family of four, \$45,000 income. Source: OFM.)

What 230 round trips with a \$3 toll would cost each year: \$690

✓ **Proposal: Require the advisory ballot to state the maximum toll that can be imposed on bridge users if the project is approved.**

✓ **Proposal: Require an additional public vote before the stated maximum toll could be exceeded.**

Bridge-users need to know the maximum toll they could be forced to pay if the Tacoma Narrows Bridge is converted from a free bridge to a toll bridge. Believe it or not, current law allows the private company operating the bridge to raise tolls as high or as often as necessary to preserve its profit margin on the project! There is currently *no* legal ceiling on how high tolls could go!

The danger is clear from Orange County's SR 91, a toll route run by a company that shares its CEO with the company that would run the Tacoma Narrows toll project. SR 91 tolls have been raised twice in just the past 10 months — **soaring to \$5.90 a round trip!** The company also imposed new tolls on car-pools and disabled American veterans, despite promises it would not.

A maximum toll should be set in law and stated in the advisory ballot *before* bridge users are made captives of a private company. And any attempt to increase tolls beyond what voters have approved should require another public vote. Fairness and the financial security of bridge users demand these common-sense legal protections.

✓ **Proposal: Shrink the voting area for the Advisory Election.**

Why are 162,000 Thurston County residents being invited to vote on whether *we* should pay tolls to cross the Tacoma Narrows? After all, DOT's own numbers show that the *combined* Weekday Economic Impact of the bridge decision on Thurston County is *zero*.

With the current boundaries, nearly two-thirds of the voters would pay only 10% of the costs should the toll-project be approved, while the other third (*that's us*) would pay fully 90% of the costs. That simply is not fair. The huge boundaries planned for the toll-bridge

advisory election violate our basic right to determine our own destiny.

I propose shrinking the election boundaries to the geographical area from which 75% of the bridge traffic originates. This is still not ideal, but it is much fairer to the citizens of Pierce and Kitsap counties.

✓ **Proposal: Make promised transportation improvements binding.**

Department of Transportation officials have held out hopes for a wide variety of transportation improvements should the toll-bridge project go forward. But we need guarantees, not hopes, that these improvements will occur. Otherwise, the \$400 million bridge project would simply shift the traffic jams a little east or west, with no real relief from congestion.

Remember — DOT can propose projects, but only the Legislature can approve funding for them. I strongly believe the bridge project should not go forward until promises of congestion relief are made binding.

I therefore propose to make construction of the toll-bridge project *conditional* on the appropriation of funds for other necessary transportation improvements, including upgrading the connection to I-5, necessary HOV lanes, upgrades on Sedgewick Road, and expanded Southworth Ferry Service.

✓ **Proposal: Move forward with immediate congestion relief**

In its single-minded pursuit of a \$400 million construction project, the Department of Transportation has ignored pleas for immediate relief from the traffic congestion around the Tacoma Narrows Bridge. Simple, effective *and cost-effective* strategies such as ramp metering, public transit, improved bus service, and car-pool incentives, would have an immediate impact on congestion.

I am working with local people and businesses to design a package of strategies for immediate relief from congestion that I will propose as a legislative budget proviso. Since the package has not been finalized yet, I welcome any suggestions you might have on what it

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should include. The main point is that we should make an immediate start on congestion relief. We've waited for relief long enough.

✓ **Proposal: Limit campaign spending by bridge-project contractors.**

A private company that can afford to build and profit from a \$400 million bridge project can afford to pay for a nearly unlimited amount of campaign advertising to sway the results of the Advisory Vote. Unless there are campaign spending limits on potential bridge-contractors, it will be impossible to have a fair vote.

Special elections in our state are notoriously vulnerable to being swayed by campaign finances. In last year's

vote on whether to build a new Seahawks stadium, for example, Paul Allen spent "a record \$5 million for a pro-stadium media blitz that saturated the airwaves during the six-week campaign" (*Seattle Times*, June 18, 1997).

Ordinary citizens cannot compete in a campaign spending war over whether to build the proposed Tacoma Narrows toll project. Therefore, to insure a fair Advisory Vote that is based on issues rather than on campaign spending, I am proposing a \$500 limit on what potential toll-project contractors can contribute to influence the outcome of the vote.

What do you think?

Our effort to make the Tacoma Narrows Advisory Vote fairer has run into a serious challenge. A survey being circulated by the Department of Transportation claims surprisingly high support for a \$3 toll. This has persuaded some legislators that \$3 tolls are OK with local residents.

But after receiving a great many phone calls, e-mails and letters from local residents who say that even a \$3 toll would be devastating to their families, I continue to believe that:

- Converting a free route into a toll route is unfair. A toll would not be a "user fee," it would be a "loser fee" because it would make us lose a free bridge. User fees should create choices, not take them away.
- It is terribly unfair to make bridge users pay 100% of the toll-project's costs when no other tolls are imposed in Washington — and none are planned, except for us.
- It is reckless as well as unfair to give a private company the legal authority to raise tolls as high or as often as is necessary to maintain its negotiated profit margin.

But what do *you* think? This issue is too important to remain silent. Please — whatever your position on Tacoma Narrows Bridge Tolls — call the Toll-free Legislative Hotline and send a message to your 26th District Legislators and the Governor.

It's free. It's quick. It's easy. And it's important for you to be heard. The Toll-free Legislative Hotline number is:

1-800-562-6000

And be sure to come speak with us during 26th District Day! It's on Wednesday, February 18 from 9:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. The starting point will be the Capitol Rotunda. We look forward to seeing you!



Tolls on the Tacoma Narrows Bridge?

What do *you* think?

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